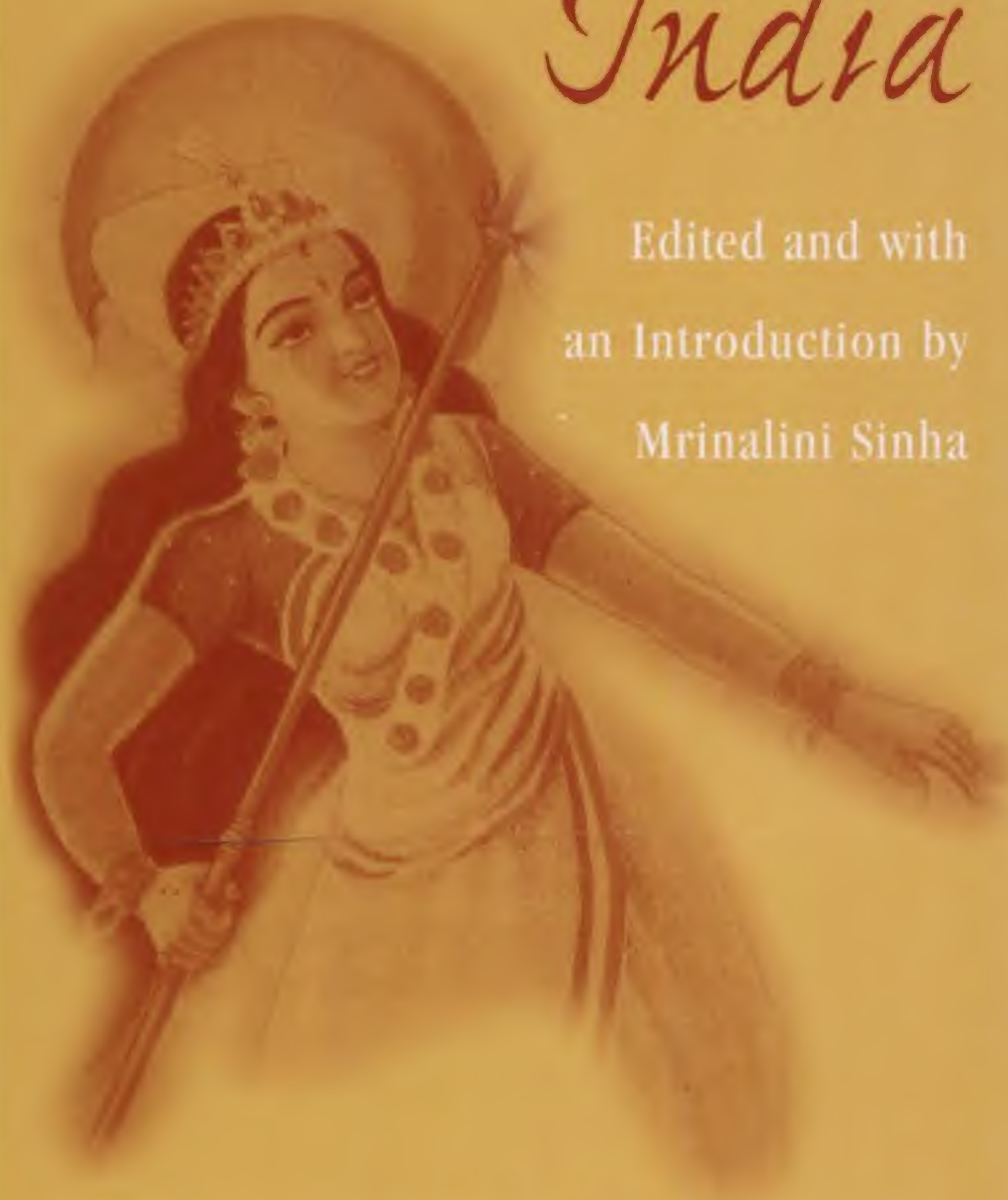


SELECTIONS FROM THE CONTROVERSIAL 1927 TEXT

# *Mother India*

Edited and with  
an Introduction by  
Mrinalini Sinha



MICHIGAN

KATHERINE MAYO

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was originally published in 1998 by Kali for Women Press, New Delhi.  
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The University of Michigan Press

Manufactured in the United States of America

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2003 2002 2001 2000 4 3 2 1

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*A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mayo, Katherine, 1868?-1940.

[*Mother India. Selections*]

*Selections from Mother India* / Katherine Mayo ; edited and with an  
introduction by Mrinalini Sinha.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-472-09715-6 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-472-06715-X  
(pbk. : alk. paper)

1. India—Civilization—1765–1947. 2. India—Social conditions. 3.  
Women—India—Social conditions. 4. Mayo, Katherine, 1868?–1940.  
*Mother India*. I. Title: *Mother India*. II. Sinha, Mrinalini, 1960–.  
III. Title.

DS428.M382 2000

954.03—dc21

99-058162



## INTRODUCTION

*Mrinalini Sinha*

*Mother India*, a polemical attack against Indian self-rule written by U.S. author Katherine Mayo, has acquired something of a legendary status among students of colonial India and, in particular, of Indian women. When *Mother India* was published jointly in the United States (Harcourt, Brace and Company) and in Britain (Jonathan Cape) in the summer of 1927, it was celebrated and reviled by die-hard imperialists and outraged nationalists. The imperialist/nationalist controversy that it generated reverberates even today and thus is still worth revisiting now, some fifty years after Indian independence. One reason, of course, is that the echoes of the controversy still haunt contemporary discussions of the nature of Mayo's intervention in *Mother India*. Another reason, however, is that the massive controversy over *Mother India* was itself an important event with long-term implications for the future development of modern nationalism as well as of middle-class feminism in India. For, in responding to Mayo's polemical argument in *Mother India*, the leaders of the nationalist movement and of the independent all-India women's movement laid the foundations of an alliance that gave modern Indian nationalism its distinctive character, captured in the popular nationalist slogan: "India cannot be free until its women are free and women cannot be free until India is free."<sup>1</sup> The controversy

<sup>1</sup>Although the significance of the "woman question" in Indian nationalism predated the *Mother India* controversy, I argue that the alliance between a nascent all-India women's movement and Indian nationalism was forged in the wake of the controversy. See Mrinalini Sinha, "Refashioning Mother India: The Advent of a Nationalist "Indian" Modernity in Late Colonial India," MS.



surrounding *Mother India* thus marked a crucial turning point in the history of modern nationalism and feminism in late colonial India.

When Mayo's book was first published, it created a sensation on three continents. Even today few books—apart, perhaps, from Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1989)—can match the scale of the international controversy generated by *Mother India*.<sup>2</sup> The book quickly became something of a cause célèbre in the United States, Britain, and India. It was hotly debated on public platforms and journal and newspaper columns in all three countries. It was protested on the streets of New York, San Francisco, London, and Calcutta and was burned outside the Town Hall in New York City.<sup>3</sup> Questions about the British government's involvement in the book were raised in the Central Legislative Assembly in India as well as in Parliament in Britain. Some Indian members of the Legislative Assembly even called for banning the book in India. Far from being banned, however, the book was made available to a larger reading public both abroad and in India through translations of the entire book (or of selected extracts) into various European and vernacular Indian languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi.<sup>4</sup> *Mother India*, in fact, spawned something of a mini-industry, with more than fifty books and pamphlets published in response to it. Mayo's book also inspired a Broadway musical, Madame Nazimova's *India*, about a twelve-year-old Hindu child-bride married to an old and sickly man. Even Hollywood was drawn into the hype surrounding the book and made an abortive bid to secure the rights to immortalize *Mother India* on the big screen.<sup>5</sup> *Mother India*, moreover, also featured in

<sup>2</sup>Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking Penguin, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>22 Jan. 1928, *New York Times*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>I examine the various responses to *Mother India* in *Refashioning Mother India*.

<sup>5</sup>The Broadway musical opened at the Palace Theatre in 1928; see Notice, in Folder no. 41, Ser. 1, Box 6, *Katherine Mayo Papers*, Manuscript Group No. 35 at the Manuscript Archives Division, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University (henceforth: *K.M. Papers*). For Hollywood's abortive bid to the film *Mother India*, see Raymond Crossell of



the discussions around several contemporary legislative initiatives: the fate of the Hindu (a term used loosely for all the inhabitants of India) Citizenship Bill in the U.S. Senate; the composition of the Indian Statutory Commission appointed by the British Parliament; the passage of the Child-Marriage Restraint Act for India in the Legislative Assembly; and the passage of the Age of Marriage Act in the British Parliament. Finally, Mayo's *Mother India* attracted the attention of such famous contemporaries as M.K. Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, E.V. Ramaswami Periyar, Muthulakshmi Reddi, Winston Churchill, Rudyard Kipling, Edward Thompson, Eleanor Rathbone, Annie Besant, Romaine Rolland, Wyndham Lewis, Norman Brown, and Agnes Smedley.

*Mother India* was written after Mayo and her friend and collaborator, Moyca Newell, made a three-month tour of India in the winter of 1925–26. The four hundred–odd pages of the book, backed by copious references to several official and non-official sources on India, contained a strong indictment of the demands for Indian self-rule and an argument in favor of continued British rule over India. *Mother India* offered a wide ranging discussion of the various ills that Mayo felt beset Indian society: the deplorable treatment of women, of “untouchables,”<sup>6</sup> and of animals; the unsanitary conditions of Indian life; and the hypocrisy and hollowness of the educated Indians, especially of the new breed of nationalist Indian politicians in the 1920s. The main thesis of *Mother India*, however, was contained in Parts 1 and 2 of the book. Here Mayo laid out her central argument that the root of all of India's problems lay in the sexual organization of Hindu society. “The whole pyramid of the Indian's woes,” she wrote, was the result not of any political or economic causes, but of the Indian male's “manner of getting into this world and his sex-life thereafter” (p. 83). The book thus painted a highly sensationalized picture of

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Curtis Brown Ltd. to Mayo, 19 Oct. 1932, in Folder no. 62, Ser. 1, Box 7, K.M. Papers.

<sup>6</sup>The term that was used to describe persons whose very touch was considered polluting by caste Hindus.



rampant sexuality and its consequences in India: masturbation, rape, homosexuality, prostitution, venereal diseases, and, most important of all, early sexual intercourse and premature maternity. It was the sexual excess of the Indian male, Mayo concluded, that had left him with hands, "too weak, too fluttering . . . to hold the reins of Government" (p. 92). Mayo's further point was that the ills of Indian society, unlike anything to be found in the West, were not merely problems that were regrettable and thus subject to correction. Rather, the ills of Indian society belonged to the very essence of Hinduism and, as such, were actually condoned by Hindu religion and culture. Her argument that the backwardness of India stemmed not from political or economic causes but from religious and cultural ones served two important purposes: it countered nationalist Indian claims of Indian superiority in the realm of culture and spirituality over the materialistic West;<sup>7</sup> and it exempted colonial rule from any responsibility for the backwardness of India, eliciting instead sympathy for the reform work of the countless British men and women who labored selflessly against such odds.

For such a crudely propagandistic work, however, *Mother India* has enjoyed a curiously long life. The popularity of *Mother India* has long outlived the immediate circumstances of its intervention. This is reflected, for example, in the publishing history of *Mother India*. By the 1950s Harcourt, Brace and Company alone reported a sales of 395,678 copies for its various editions of *Mother India*.<sup>8</sup> The book was reprinted several times, including a cheaper edition published by Jonathan Cape in 1930 and a separate Indian edition published by Allied Publishers of Bombay in 1945. Even more recent reprints of *Mother India*—including a 1970 reprint in Britain, a 1984 reprint in the United States, and a

<sup>7</sup>The discourse of "official" Indian nationalism, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, acknowledged its surrender to the West in the "material" realm and claimed superiority for itself in the "spiritual" realm; see P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Publications, 1986).

<sup>8</sup>Letter from Harcourt, Brace, and Co. to Moyca Newell, 23 June 1955, in Folder no. 96, Ser. 1, Box 11, K.M. Papers.



1986 reprint in India—have done little to question the myths surrounding *Mother India*.<sup>9</sup>

Although in the 1920s and 1930s leaders of both the nationalist and the women's movements in India had strongly condemned *Mother India*, the book continued to have an enormous influence in shaping perceptions about India and Indian women, especially in Mayo's home country. A survey of some 350 adults in the United States in the 1950s revealed that *Mother India* was second only to the works of Rudyard Kipling as the most popular source of information in the United States on India.<sup>10</sup> Anecdotal evidence further suggests that *Mother India* was still being recommended to Peace Corps volunteers as an introduction to India up until the 1970s. The latest chapter in the legend of *Mother India*, however, has been the product of some feminist- and women's studies-inspired scholarship in the United States. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) marked this latest revival in *Mother India*'s reputation. Daly's theory of "planetary patriarchy" relied on, and celebrated, Mayo's contribution in *Mother India* uncritically. Ignoring the contributions of generations of both Indian and foreign women and men, Daly elevated Mayo as the most important voice articulating a feminist critique of indigenous patriarchy in India.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>The introduction to a 1970 reprint of *Mother India* (1927; rpt., London: Howard Baker Pub. Ltd, 1970) commends Mayo's "grimly factual" account and concludes: "For this is India as it truly was—and as parts of it still are—in all its helplessness, hopelessness and horror." Also see *Mother India* (New Delhi: Ammol, 1986); and *Mother India* (New York: Greenwood, 1984).

<sup>10</sup>Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York: John Day, 1958), p. 271. Also see A.M. Rosenthal, "'Mother India' Thirty Years Later," *Foreign Affairs* 4 (July 1957): pp. 620–30; and Milton Singer, "Passage to More than India: A Sketch of Changing European and American Images," *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1972), pp. 11–38.

<sup>11</sup>Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), esp. p. 119. For a general critique of the use of the "third world woman" in some feminist texts in the West, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World*



Although others, like Elisabeth Bumiller, have found it hard to ignore the overtly racist and imperialist tone of *Mother India*, they nevertheless reiterate the view of Mayo as a pioneering, if somewhat flawed, U.S. feminist who was concerned with the condition of women in India. In the preface to *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey among the Women of India* (1990), therefore, Bumiller acknowledges Mayo as an inspiration for her own writing on Indian women.<sup>12</sup> There is, indeed, a broader revisionism afoot among some scholars, not all of whom are writing from the United States, for reappraising the nationalist criticism of Mayo and resurrecting Mayo's reputation in the name of feminist-inspired scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

The *Mother India*-based myth of Mayo as a feminist crusader has persisted despite Manoranjan Jha's *Katherine Mayo and India* (1971)—the only full-length scholarly treatment of the *Mother India* controversy—which demonstrated the political motives behind Mayo's book and reconstructed Mayo's connections to the official British imperial propaganda machine.<sup>14</sup> One reason

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*Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. C.T. Mohanty, A. Russo, and L. Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 51–80.

<sup>12</sup>Elisabeth Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons* (New York: Random House, 1990), pp. 21–22. Bharathi Mukerjee's critical response to Bumiller's reference to Mayo is discussed in Nina Mehta's review, "Stranger in a Strange Land," *Women's Review of Books* 8, no. 3 (1990): pp. 19–20. The view that Mayo was at worst a misguided imperial feminist is also reiterated in Liz Wilson "Who Is Authorized to Speak? Katherine Mayo and the Politics of Imperial Feminism in British India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25 (1997): pp. 139–51.

<sup>13</sup>For a recent example of such revisionsism, see William W. Emilsen, "Gandhi and Mayo's 'Mother India,'" *South Asia* 10, no. 1 (1987): pp. 69–82; and for the debate occasioned by Emilsen's argument, see P. Athiyaman and A.R. Venkatachalapathy, "On Gandhi, Mayo and Emilsen," *South Asia* 12, no. 2 (1989): pp. 83–88; and W. Emilsen, "A Note on Mayo, Athiyaman and Venkatachalapathy," *South Asia* 12, no. 2 (1989): pp. 88–93.

<sup>14</sup>Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1971). I remain indebted to Jha's pioneering work for my discussion of the production of *Mother India*.



fore *Mother India*, Mayo was already well-known as the author of several books. The spirit of *Mother India*, indeed, was in keeping with much of Mayo's other writings on various domestic and imperial issues. For, despite the fact that Mayo was associated early in her career as a research assistant with such liberal political figures as Oswald Garrison Villard, one of the cofounders of the National Advancement for Colored People, her reputation as a writer in the United States was built on championing very different kinds of political causes.<sup>16</sup> On the surface, at least, Mayo's writing career shared much with the well-established late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century tradition of "muckraking," which produced the kind of journalistic exposés that had resulted in many a Progressive-era reform in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Unlike much of this muckraking tradition, however, Mayo's pen was typically mobilized in support of some of the same powerful, establishment interests that were often the targets of muckraking exposés.

Mayo's early involvement with state police reform in the United States, as Gerda Ray has demonstrated, established the class, gender, and racial ideologies that colored much of Mayo's career.<sup>18</sup> Mayo and Newell orchestrated a highly successful campaign for the creation of a rural State Police Force in New York against a background of stiff opposition, especially from socialists and labor groups. In the course of this campaign Mayo published several books on the Pennsylvania State

<sup>16</sup>Mayo served as Villard's assistant for his book *John Brown, 1800–1855* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1910). For Mayo and Villard's correspondence, see, apart from the *K.M. Papers*, the *Oswald Garrison Villard Papers*, Houghton Library, Harvard University. For an account of Villard's life, see O.G. Villard, *Fighting Years: Memoirs of a Fighting Editor* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1939).

<sup>17</sup>The origin of the term *muckraking* is associated with President Theodore Roosevelt, who, however, used the term pejoratively. For a brief and accessible introduction to, and a few sample documents of, the phenomenon of "muckraking" journalism, see *Muckraking: Three Landmark Articles*, edited, with an introduction, by Ellen F. Fitzpatrick (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup>Gerda Ray, "From Cossack to Trooper: Manliness, Police Reform, and the State," *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1995): pp. 565–86.



Police Force, the earliest of the state forces in the United States and the model for the creation of the New York state constabulary. The reputation of the Pennsylvania force, however, had already come under a cloud for its highly partisan role in the settlement of labor disputes in the state. During the strike at the Wilkes-Barre Railway Company, for example, the unsavory conduct of the force had resulted in a vast number of citizen complaints about the force.<sup>19</sup> Mayo's books glossed over such complaints and extolled the virtues of the Pennsylvania force in highly embellished stories. Even a member of the Pennsylvania force, who was one of Mayo's several informants for her glamorized stories about the state police, commented to her in private: "The story is very good, but in places highly colored. You are making the State Policemen too ideal in your stories."<sup>20</sup> The commanding officer of another of the companies of the Pennsylvania State Police was more blunt in acknowledging Mayo's contribution: "We are very grateful to you for keeping our skeletons safely stowed away in their respective closets."<sup>21</sup> One of Mayo's correspondents, a Cleveland high school teacher, who would wonder if Mayo had not been too "one-sided" in her later portrayal of Filipinos and Indians, raised similar questions about her work on the Pennsylvania State Police: "is it a wholly commendable and impartial force or whether as labor men often say, it becomes an instrument of the employers to break the Unions in strike."<sup>22</sup> Subtlety and balance, obviously, were not among Mayo's virtues as a writer.

Mayo's books, as Ray has suggested, were highly successful as propaganda for the state police precisely because of the gendered and racial urgency that she gave her stories on the

<sup>19</sup>Letter to Mayo, 19 Feb. 1917, in Folder no. 13, Ser. 1, Box 2, K.M. Papers.

<sup>20</sup>Letter from Captain "D" Troop, Pennsylvania State Force, dated 24 Dec. 1917, in Folder no. 15, Ser. 1, Box 2, K.M. Papers.

<sup>21</sup>Letter from Commander of Pennsylvania State Force, Troop "A" to Mayo, dated 29 Oct. 1917, in Folder No. 14, Ser. 1, Box 2, K.M. Papers.

<sup>22</sup>Letter to Mayo, 30 Aug. 1927, in Folder no. 36, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers.



Pennsylvania force. In making her case for the state police force, Mayo effectively invoked the twin specters of hordes of male immigrants and "Negroes," who lacked "manly" self-control, and of defenseless Anglo-Saxon women, who needed the manly protection of the state police.<sup>23</sup> Against the violence that Mayo associated with immigrants and African Americans, the members of the state police force were portrayed by Mayo as the upholders of law and order and, indeed, of civilization itself. Mayo's books on the state police, *Justice to All: History of the Pennsylvania State Police* (1917), *The Standard Bearers: True Stories of Heroes of Law and Order* (1918), and *Mounted Justice* (1922), were justly credited for having laid the foundations for the state police force.<sup>24</sup>

Yet Mayo's books on the state police force also put her at odds with many reformist and feminist circles in the United States. While her books enjoyed the support of powerful politicians and public figures, they elicited a much more critical response from reformers sympathetic to the interests of labor as well as from many liberal women's groups and feminists in the United States. Mayo herself was quite dismissive of criticism of her books from such quarters. Later, indeed, Mayo would dismiss feminist criticism in the United States of *Mother India* by alluding to her long estrangement from U.S. feminists, who had earlier reviled her heroes of the Pennsylvania State Police as "brutal state cossacks."<sup>25</sup>

Mayo, in fact, received a much more sympathetic hearing from conservative women's groups, for whom contemporary feminist activism was tainted by the evils of "bolshevism."<sup>26</sup> As

<sup>23</sup>My discussion here is indebted to Ray, "From Cossack to Trooper," esp. pp. 570-72.

<sup>24</sup>*Justice to All: History of the Pennsylvania State Police* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1917); *The Standard Bearers: True Stories of Heroes of Law and Order* (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1918); and *Mounted Justice* (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1922).

<sup>25</sup>See Mayo's comment in the *Philadelphia Record*, n.d., in Folder no. 214, Ser. 4, Box 41, K.M. Papers.

<sup>26</sup>For a discussion both of the work of reformist women and of the backlash against them, see Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).



a reformer, Mayo appealed much more to women's organizations that had a history of "red-baiting" feminists in the United States than to liberal women's activists. The dominant trend of women's activism vis-à-vis the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to Paula Baker, consisted of the "domestication of politics," the results of such women's campaigns as maternal and child welfare legislation and protective factory legislation.<sup>27</sup> Mayo's constituency in the United States, despite her subsequent reincarnation as a champion of social welfare legislation in *Mother India*, was drawn largely from conservative women's organizations that were opposed to the type of social welfare legislation associated with feminist activism in the United States. The Massachusetts Public Interest League, for example, had mounted a successful opposition to the Child Labor Amendment as a subversive "feminist" and "bolshevist" measure.<sup>28</sup> It was organizations like the Massachusetts Public Interest League that became some of the strongest supporters among women's groups in the United States for Mayo's *Mother India*. The Massachusetts Public Interest League and the equally conservative Daughters of the American Revolution welcomed *Mother India* warmly and invited Mayo to address their respective organizations. Margaret Robinson of the Massachusetts Public Interest League identified in Mayo, notwithstanding Mayo's ostensible support for social welfare legislations in India, a kindred soul who was opposed to the subversive activities of feminists and bolshevists in the United States and of "native" nationalists abroad. Robinson congratulated Mayo for having produced a book that would be "useful to counteract communist propaganda about India." "Our League," she wrote, "is doing valuable work in educating women as to the menace of subversive forces working through-

<sup>27</sup>See Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): pp. 620-47.

<sup>28</sup>For the controversy over the Child Labor Amendment in the 1920s, see Walter I. Trattner, *Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).



out the world." Robinson was concerned quite specifically with the impact of Theosophists and of women, such as Annie Besant in particular, who were putting the "degrading religion of India on a par with or above the Christian religion."<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, the more liberal women's organizations that supported maternity and child welfare legislation in the United States remained much more skeptical of Mayo's contribution in *Mother India*. As the account of one of Mayo's supporters reveals, feminists in the United States, whom he accused of combining support for birth control with love for the "Negro" and the "Hindoo," were more likely to question Mayo's new role as a champion of women and children in *Mother India*.<sup>30</sup> Mayo's own sympathies—reflected as well in her obsession with the impact of bolshevist propaganda in India—were in keeping with the conservative women's groups who kept their distance from feminists. It is perhaps all the more ironic, then, that today some latter-day feminists in the United States have been trying to reclaim Mayo's *Mother India* for a progressive feminist politics.

Mayo also shared common fears for an allegedly beleaguered white Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment in the United States with organizations such as the Massachusetts Public Interest League and the Daughters of the American Revolution.<sup>31</sup> Mayo, herself a member of the Society of May-

<sup>29</sup>M. Robinson to Mayo, 4 Aug. 1927, in Folder no. 37, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers.

<sup>30</sup>Letter from Harvey Watts to Mayo, dated 12 Jan. 1928, in Folder 42, Ser. 1, Box 6, K.M. Papers. For Mayo's estrangement from U.S. feminists, also see the contrast that her supporters made between the position of Mayo and that of Gertrude Ely of the National League of Women Voters, who was also visiting India in 1927, see J.H. Adams to Mayo, 27 Jan. 1927, in Folder no. 36, Ser. 1, Box 5; and Ely to Mayo, 15 Sept. 1927, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers. Yet, as many Indian feminists discovered, *Mother India* did hold enormous fascination for women in the United States, see Muthulakshmi Reddi's discussion of the impact of *Mother India* in her own account of her visit to the international women's conference in Chicago in 1933, *Stri Dharma* 17, no. 1 (Nov. 1933): pp. 20–23.

<sup>31</sup>See Mabel Benedict, New Jersey chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, to Mayo, 3 Jan. 1928, in Folder no. 42, Ser. 1, Box



flower Descendants, was hostile toward certain minority groups within the United States and toward the immigration of others to the United States. Her disdain for Catholics, for example, had already aroused controversy in her books on the Pennsylvania State Police force. Mayo's story "The Honor of the Force," which appeared first in the *Saturday Evening Post* and was later reprinted in *The Standard Bearers*, provoked a barrage of letters from irate Catholics who found the piece and its depiction of the Catholic priest, Father Cantelmi, deliberately anti-Catholic. The Acting Superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Force, George Lumb, who in the wake of the controversy urged Mayo to verify her facts, explained the reasons behind the controversy in the following manner: "I think that the psychological reason [at the] back of this storm of protest is not the fact in the case, but the manner in which the Priest was described by your facile hand; the shovel hat, the flaunting robes and sardonic leer on his saturnine countenance have done more to arouse the people of his faith against your story than the [facts of the case]." <sup>32</sup> Mayo's publishers, Houghton Mifflin and Company, asked her to remove the libelous passages about Father Cantelmi from her story before it was reprinted in *The Standard Bearers*. <sup>33</sup> The "East Indians," who accounted for a much less visible presence in the United States, would be subjected to similar treatment by Mayo's "facile hand." <sup>34</sup>

The fear that expatriate Indians in the United States were a source of potential threat to the dominant religious and cultural

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5, K.M. Papers. For a general background to the politics of organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, during the 1920s, see William O'Neill, *Feminism in America: A History* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1989), p. 229.

<sup>32</sup>George Lumb to Mayo, 2 Apr. 1918, in Folder no. 17, Ser. 1, Box 3, K.M. Papers.

<sup>33</sup>Houghton Mifflin and Co. to Mayo, 10 Apr. 1918, in Folder no. 17, Ser. 1, Box 3, K.M. Papers.

<sup>34</sup>For a history of "East Indians" in the United States, see Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).



fabric of the nation was a strong motivating factor for Mayo in the writing of *Mother India*. Mayo, like the Massachusetts Public Interest League, was wary of a growing trend in the United States, which she associated especially with women's clubs, of flirting with notions about Eastern spiritual superiority over the West. Mayo feared that Americans were succumbing to the superficial charm of eloquent speakers, especially visiting Indians, who apparently made quite an impression on the lecture circuits in the United States. The favorable reception of recent visitors to the United States, such as the Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, seemed to confirm the suspicions of Mayo and her like-minded friends.<sup>35</sup> Tagore's unfavorable comparison of Western materialism with Eastern spirituality were especially galling to Mayo and her friends. F.C. Mortimer of the *New York Times* described Tagore in a letter to Mayo as "a dog that bites the hand that feeds him." To Mortimer, therefore, the real achievement of *Mother India* lay precisely in its response to the sort of propaganda associated with men like Tagore: "probably India is much like the other Eastern lands in morals and manners, but unlike the others it has claimed a 'spiritual' superiority to the West and usually this claim has been admitted. You have put an end to *that*."<sup>36</sup> Mayo herself reiterated often enough that her aim in writing *Mother India* was to provide the American public with the "true" picture of Indian civilization as a counter to the nationalist propaganda about a superior Indian spirituality that was being swallowed by the "India-lovers" in the United States.

Mayo, like the many supporters of the Asian Exclusion Acts in the United States, was equally concerned about the prospect of citizenship rights for expatriate Indians. While commenting on her reasons for writing *Mother India* at a private meeting in London, Mayo was reported to have confessed—a report that

<sup>35</sup>For a discussion of Tagore's reception in the United States, see Ranajan Borra, "Rabindranath Tagore: Cultural Ambassador of India to the U.S.," in *Women, Politics and Literature*, ed. Clinton B. Seely (East Lansing, Mich.: Asian Studies Center, 1981), pp. 138–45.

<sup>36</sup>F.C. Mortimer to Mayo, n.d., in Folder no. 36, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers.





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her subsequent books on India,<sup>53</sup> for her admission placed British officials and various government agencies in India in a very awkward situation.

The newly created Bureau of Public Information in India, which was at the mercy of the Central Legislative Assembly, with its elected Indian majority to vote funds annually for its continued existence, was the most hard hit by the controversy.<sup>54</sup> Mayo's faux pas also made British officials in New York and in London more nervous about extending any further co-operation to Mayo for her subsequent books on India. Hugh MacGregor, who was the Information Officer at the India Office in London, sympathized with the nervousness of British officials in their future dealings with Mayo. MacGregor, however, decided that for the India Office it was much safer, given the nature of Mayo's work, to continue to play some role in her future projects rather than leave her entirely to her own devices. MacGregor, therefore, first "lectured" Mayo on her blunder in referring to government help for *Mother India* and, then, as a condition for his continued support for her subsequent projects "obtained from her the promise that in no circumstances will references again be made to official sources of help."<sup>55</sup> The British and colonial Indian government's denial of any official involvement in Mayo's project was thus a disingenuous half-truth.

The production of *Mother India*, in fact, was characterized by government support—whether "official" or "unofficial"—from the very outset. Before embarking for India, Mayo had met with Earl Winterton, the Under-Secretary of State for India

<sup>53</sup>For the fallout caused by Mayo's blunder, see *Secretary of State Private Office Papers: Personal Files: Katherine Mayo File*, India Office Library and Records (henceforth cited as *Personal Files: K.M.*).

<sup>54</sup>See L.F. Rushbrook Williams (director of Bureau of Public Information in India), *Inside Both Indias, 1914–1938* (Gloucester: Earle and Ludlow, n.d), p. 38; in *Rushbrook Williams Papers*, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

<sup>55</sup>See letters from Hugh MacGregor, India Office, to Stephens, director of Public Information, Government of India, dated 25 Jan. 1935 and 19 Feb. 1935, in *Personal Files: K.M.*



in London, who expressed his "personal sympathies" with Mayo's objectives but "desired to take council whether [these objectives] would be best effected by full official recognition or by quieter means."<sup>56</sup> Although the meeting concluded with the understanding that Mayo would show Winterton a copy of her manuscript before publication, Mayo, on the advice of officials in India with which Winterton himself concurred, decided eventually against such a step. In February 1927 Mayo wrote Winterton from New York: "I feel . . . that it will be happier for you, and stronger for the book, if you can all say, after it comes out, that you had no knowledge of its nature, that you were never afforded a reading or even a synopsis of the text, that your connection with it is limited to travel courtesy offered to a strange American and to the civility of answering requests for published statistics."<sup>57</sup> While a denial along these lines enabled British officials to persist in maintaining their innocence regarding *Mother India*, it did not allay the justifiable suspicions of Mayo's critics about the extent of government involvement in her project.

The further point, moreover, is that Mayo kept key colonial officials in both Britain and India apprized of the nature and scope of her book on India. Mayo was constantly in close consultation with officials at various levels, from the junior to the most senior. She did not hesitate to disclose to them that her aim was to help the British cause in India through her book in any way they deemed desirable. Immediately upon her arrival in India, for example, Mayo wrote to Sir Basil Blackett, the Finance Member of the Government of India, explaining her objectives in undertaking her project on India:

Briefly we want to be useful to our own country, and we think that our own country's greatest need is a better understanding of and closer sympathetic relationship with Great Britain. Against such understanding and sympathy there is in America, a constant effort—sometimes open, some-

<sup>56</sup>Mayo's Diary entry for 22 Oct. 1925, in Folder no. 113, Ser. 2, Box 13, K.M. Papers.

<sup>57</sup>Mayo to Winterton, 6 Feb. 1927, in Folder no. 36, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers.



times subtle and covered; and its greatest ally is the ignorance of the public on the points attached. . . . The British administration in India is always conspicuous among these. And it therefore occurred to us that if we could do, in India some such work as we did in the Philippines, we might cut some ground from under the feet of the trouble-makers—But to that end, it was, of course, necessary to choose some circumscribed field, and out of that to choose a few striking and representative examples, to sustain statistics and a general argument. A non-political, non-controversial field would be best, in order to work aside from grounds already occupied by prejudices implanted by the enemy propaganda. . . . And the fact that we come of our own pleasure committed to no one at home or abroad, we have also found in like cases to be an asset—I went to the India Office as well as to the Health Ministry in London to explain this, and to ask for their approval in undertaking this errand.<sup>58</sup>

Mayo's political objectives were so blatant that even sympathetic government officials who came into contact with her team in India often expressed their discomfort at her obvious partisanship. The Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces (U.P.), Sir William Marris, to whom Mayo had letters of introduction from London, expressed his concern to Mayo's secretary, Harry Field. Field, in turn, tried to warn Mayo of the impression she was creating among some British officials in India:

[The Lieutenant Governor] is really perturbed about you, dear, he says that you appeared to them all, here, to be like a good hound on a scent running it down in a splendid manner . . . or like an excellent barrister preparing a brief . . . against India. He couldn't give any viewpoint against you except "playing cricket" and "it is their country and they have a right to rule it." He said that many of your questions pointed to a preconceived opinion . . . and all lead one way.<sup>59</sup>

At no stage of Mayo's project, indeed, were colonial officials ever in doubt about the general outcome of the disingenuous "research" that Mayo was undertaking into the conditions in India.

The biggest irony, perhaps, is that, despite *Mother India's*

<sup>58</sup>Mayo to Blackett, 25 Dec. 1925, in Folder no. 7, *Sir Basil Blackett Papers*, India Office Library and Records.

<sup>59</sup>Field to Mayo, n.d., in Folder no. 226, Ser. 4, Box 42, *K.M. Papers*.





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deliberately to make "Hindus out of them."<sup>71</sup> Even more blatant, perhaps, was Mayo's deliberate manipulation of the "communal card" in *Volume II* (1931), a collection of excerpts from the report of the Age of Consent Committee appointed by the Government of India to explore the need to raise the age of consent for sexual intercourse in India; and in *The Face of Mother India* (1935), a pictorial representation of India and of Indian women.

Mayo's exploitation of communal (religious sectarian) politics in the two latter books were so obvious that even her erstwhile allies found it hard to overlook. The British feminist Eleanor Rathbone, who had been a great supporter of *Mother India* and had been inspired by the book to take upon herself the responsibility for ameliorating the suffering of the child-brides of India, could not help rebuking Mayo for having deliberately misinterpreted evidence on child marriage in *Volume II*. This later book, according to Rathbone, had lost its usefulness because Mayo was too keen to show that the evils of child marriage were a specifically Hindu phenomenon.<sup>72</sup> Even the colonial government, on its own initiative, decided to ban *The Face of Mother India* from India because, as one official explained, the "whole thesis of it is Hindu-Muslim antagonism."<sup>73</sup> MacGregor of the India Office, who had earlier concluded that it was in the interest of his office to cooperate with Mayo on the *Face of Mother India*, admitted to Mayo that the "anti-Hindu and pro-Muslim bias [of the book was] too pronounced" for the government to permit its sale in India.<sup>74</sup> Cornelia Sorabji, a friend and confidante of Mayo's and one of the

<sup>71</sup>Letter from Mayo to J.C. Pringle, n.d., in Folder no. 215, Ser. 4, Box 42, K.M. Papers.

<sup>72</sup>Letter from Rathbone to Mayo, n.d., in Folder no. 97, Ser. 1, Box 11, K.M. Papers. For Rathbone's criticism of Mayo for deliberately exempting the British and the Muslim population from any blame for the effects of child marriage and premature maternity in India, see also Rathbone to Lothian, 29 Nov. 1931, in Folder 7, Box 93, *Eleanor Rathbone Papers*, Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University.

<sup>73</sup>Stephens to MacGregor, 27 Jan. 1936, *Personal Files: K.M.*

<sup>74</sup>Letter from MacGregor to Mayo, n.d., in Folder no. 78, Ser. 1, Box 10, K.M. Papers.



only prominent Indian women to publish a sympathetic review of *Mother India*, had already decided against having her photograph used in the *Face of Mother India* for fear that its obvious bias against Hindus would alienate her from her orthodox Hindu friends and clients in India.<sup>75</sup> Mayo was thus unable to sustain again what the "accident" of her association with Adams had once made possible in *Mother India*: her masquerade as a genuine crusader against the treatment of women and children in India.

There was, indeed, little in Mayo's career either before or after *Mother India* that lends credence to her subsequent reputation as a feminist crusader. Mayo's career in the United States prior to *Mother India* as well as the particular route by which she happened to arrive at the special focus of *Mother India* suggest that her contribution to women and to feminism have been accidental at best: an arbitrary and contingent instrument deployed to advance a colonial agenda.

The subsequent myth of *Mother India*, indeed, was the product of a long history of the deployment of the "woman question" in the struggle between imperialism and nationalism in India. It was the terms of this struggle—much more than anything in the book itself—that framed *Mother India* as a contribution to the woman question in India. As several scholars have pointed out, the woman question in colonial India had already become an ideological battleground between Indian nationalists and British imperialists long before *Mother India* was published.<sup>76</sup> It was not surprising, therefore, that the first two parts of *Mother India* that dealt quite specifically with conditions affecting the status of women in India became the focus of attention and generated the most heated

<sup>75</sup>Letters from Sorabji to Mayo, dated 2 May 1935, in Folder no. 75, Ser. 1, Box 9; dated 31 Dec. 1935, in Folder no. 76, Ser. 1, Box 10, K.M. Papers.

<sup>76</sup>See Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, "Gender and Imperialism in British India," *South Asia Research* 5, no 2 (1985): pp. 147–65; and Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): pp. 119–56.



exchanges about the respective merits of British imperialism and Indian nationalism.

There was a long precedent for the appropriation of the woman question for the purposes of the moral justification of British imperialism. As far back as James Mill's *History of British India* (1817), the practices found among particular groups and in particular regions of India, such as the self-immolation of widows (popularly known as *sati*), female infanticide, the veiling of women (*pardah*), child marriage, and enforced widowhood, were treated as emblematic of all India and of Indian culture as a whole.<sup>77</sup> As such, therefore, these practices afforded a basis not only for the ideological justification of the "civilizing mission" of British imperialism in India but also for arguments about the "barbarity" of Indian culture. The framing of the woman question in these terms, however, created a negative climate for social reforms for women in India. For, on the one hand, such a limited frame focused only on Indian cultural practices, and thus conveniently ignored any negative impact that colonialism had on the condition of women in India. And, on the other, it provoked defensive Indian responses by converting specific reforms for women into occasions for an overall criticism of Indian culture. Indeed, British imperialists often used the condition of Indian women as a particularly handy stick with which to beat Indian proto-nationalists and nationalists. Hence, in various imperial conflicts, as in the "white mutiny" of 1882 against a bill that would have given Indian civil servants criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects in the Indian countryside, the British opponents of the bill used the position of Indian women to argue that Indian men were as yet "unfit" for any concessions of political or legal equality from the government.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup>For a discussion of James Mill's *History of British India* and the ideological justification of imperialism, see A.R.H. Copley, "Projections, Displacement and Distortion in 19th Century Moral Imperialism—A Re-Examination of Charles Grant and James Mill," *Calcutta Historical Journal* 7, no. 2 (Jan.–June 1983): pp. 1–27.

<sup>78</sup>See Mrinalini Sinha, "'Chathams, Pitts and Gladstones in Petticoats': The Politics of Gender and Race in the Ilbert Bill Controversy," in





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cially around the Labour Party. Hence, the outgoing Conservative Government in Britain, in an effort to put its own stamp on the pace of political change in India, announced the formation of the Indian Statutory Commission to examine the workings of the new political reforms in November 1927, a year earlier than had been provided for under the provisions of the Act of 1919. Mayo's imperialist collaborators had all along hoped that her book would be completed in time to influence the debate in the British Parliament over the composition of the Statutory Commission.<sup>89</sup> Her supporters would have been gratified to find that free copies of *Mother India* had, indeed, been distributed to every Member of Parliament in Britain by private initiative before the start of the deliberations over the composition of the Statutory Commission, also known as the Simon Commission.<sup>90</sup> The almost unanimous support that all the major political parties in Britain, including the Labour Party, gave to the appointment of an "all-white" Simon Commission to investigate political reforms in India—one that deliberately excluded all Indians—may well have been influenced, as nationalist leaders charged, by the impact of *Mother India*. British imperialists were keenly aware of the impact of *Mother India* as a caution to liberal sentiments in a Britain threatening to concede too much to the political aspirations of the Indians. Hence, imperialist-feminist Eleanor Rathbone was especially eager to see a cheaper edition of *Mother India* made available to members of the Labour Party in Britain who, she believed, "badly need the corrective of [Mayo's] book because of their tendency to espouse self-government anywhere."<sup>91</sup> The tremendous

<sup>89</sup>See Adams to Mayo, 10 Jan. 1927, in Folder no. 36, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers. For a general history of the Statutory Commission, see S.R. Bakshi, *Simon Commission and Indian Nationalism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977).

<sup>90</sup>Lady Lyttleton, who undertook to find out the identity of the donor of *Mother India*, discovered that the book had been distributed by a private individual; see Letter to the Editor, *Times*, 14 Jan. 1928; and Report in the *New York Times*, 14 Jan. 1928, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup>Letter from Rathbone to Mayo, dated 24 August 1927, in Folder no. 37, Ser. 1, Box 5, K.M. Papers. For a similar sentiment about the impor-





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ment, on the one hand, and asserting it against rival political movements within India, on the other.<sup>92</sup> Mayo's foray into the woman question, then, received more than its share of attention from Indian nationalists as well. It was, indeed, the changing imperatives of British imperialism and Indian nationalism in the 1920s that helped make a book, which was hardly original in its subject or exceptional in its argument, the center of an unprecedented international controversy.

The massive imperialist/nationalist controversy over *Mother India* left the woman question in India transformed. The controversy, indeed, had the effect of consolidating the claims of the organized women's movement in India and of middle-class Indian women to represent what came to be touted as the "authentic voice of modern Indian womanhood" in debates over the condition of women in India.<sup>93</sup> The controversy thus marked an important turning point in the history of the woman question in colonial India: henceforth, the contributions of middle-class Indian women and of the organized women's movement in India would prove more difficult to ignore.

It is ironic, however, that a book that scarcely acknowledged the agency of Indian women themselves became the means for providing greater visibility to the contributions of the organized women's movement in India. The controversy

<sup>92</sup>See Mrinalini Sinha, "The Lineage of the 'Indian' Modern: Rhetoric, Agency, and the Sarda Act in Late Colonial India," in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette Burton (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>93</sup>The quotation is from the foreword, written by Sarojini Naidu, for a collection of essays by Indian women, published in the wake of the *Mother India* controversy, see *Women in Modern India: Fifteen Papers by Indian Women Writers*, ed. Evelyn C. Gedge and Mithan Choksi (Bombay: D.B. Taraporewala Sons and Co., 1929). For an analysis of the historical production of a so-called authentic voice of modern Indian womanhood in late colonial India, see Mrinalini Sinha, "Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism: Locating the 'Indian Woman,'" in *Feminists Revision History*, ed. Ann-Louise Shapiro (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 246–75; reprinted in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 477–504.





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We honour Miss Mayo for her courage in not caring for resentments and accusations; we congratulate her on her public spirit in "shouldering the task" of "holding the mirror" to that part of the human race which is a "physical menace" to the world; we do not question her ability or her cleverness in writing this book; but we do deny her the self-presumption that she is "in a position to present conditions and their bearings," and we do not for a minute admit her "plain speech" as the "faithful wounds of a friend"; for she is no friend of ours.<sup>101</sup>

The editors of *Chand*, a popular Hindi-language paper for women, similarly chided Mayo for her gross exploitation of the condition of Indian women for her own political agenda.<sup>102</sup>

Several women activists, including Reddi, issued strong statements criticizing *Mother India* on behalf of organized women in India.<sup>103</sup> Women activists, indeed, did much to engage Indian women themselves in responding to *Mother India*. Among the several books written in response to *Mother India*, for example, there were a number that were written by women and for women in India: Charulata Devi wrote *The Fair Sex of India: A Reply to "Mother India"* (1929); Chandravati Lakhanpal, the author of the prize-winning book *Striyon ki Stithi* (The Situation of Women) (1934), wrote *Mother India Ka Jawab* (The Reply to *Mother India*) (1928); Uma Nehru, a frequent contributor to the women's journal *Stri Darpan*, wrote *Mother India Aur Uska Jawab: Miss Mayo ki "Mother India" [Sachitra Hindi Anuwad] jis me Srimati Uma Nehru likhit bhumika tatha paschimi samajavad ke vishay me Miss Mayo se do do bate* (Mother India and Its Reply: A True Translation of Miss Mayo's "Mother India" with a Dialogue between Mrs. Uma Nehru and Miss Mayo on Western

<sup>101</sup>Quoted in Padmini Sengupta, *The Portrait of an Indian Woman* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A., 1956), pp. 179–80. For a fuller discussion of the role of Indian women in the *Mother India* controversy, see Mrinalini Sinha, "Reading *Mother India*: Empire, Nation, and the Female Voice," *Journal of Woman's History* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1994): pp. 6–44.

<sup>102</sup>"Bharat-Mata (Mother India)," *Chand* (Nov. 1927): pp. 7–16.

<sup>103</sup>Reddi responded to Mayo's thesis, especially Mayo's obsession with sex, in some detail; see "Comment on Miss Mayo's Book about Indians" and "Miss Mayo Answered" in "Speeches and Writings," vol. 2, pts. 1–2, *Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers*.



Civilization) (1928); and Padmabai Sanjeeva Rau, an active educationist and Theosophist, wrote *Women's Views on Indian Problems* (1927) as a direct challenge to Mayo's *Mother India*. Cornelia Sorabji's positive review of *Mother India* in the *Englishman* stands out as an exception to the more common pattern of Indian women's public response to Mayo.<sup>104</sup> As president of the Federation of University Women in India, however, Sorabji faced a revolt from hostile female graduates in Calcutta for her reluctance to denounce Mayo's *Mother India* publicly.<sup>105</sup> The dominant response to *Mother India* among the active and articulate section of middle-class women in India was noted by the male author of *Sister India*: "the women of India have held meetings in every part of India and have unanimously protested against *her* description of their trouble."<sup>106</sup>

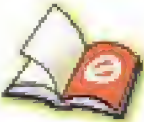
Although Indian women's responses to *Mother India* did reflect the full range of positions found in the general nationalist critiques of *Mother India*, the position of the independent women's movement in India was consistent with its goals on reforms for women. The position adopted by the women's movement on *Mother India* was a delicate balance between condemnation of the book itself and recognition of the urgent need for the reform of women's position in India. The biggest women's protest meeting against *Mother India*, which was sponsored by the WIA together with several other women's organizations and was held in Triplicane in Madras, reflected this sentiment. The resolutions passed at the meeting denied

<sup>104</sup>Cornelia Sorabji, "Mother India—The Incense of Service: What Sacrifice Can We Make?" *Englishman*, pt. 1, 31 Aug. 1927, pp. 6–7; and pt. 2, 1 Sept. 1927, pp. 6–9. Most other Indian women who had met Mayo during her visit to India, such as Mona Bose and Dorothy Roy, quickly distanced themselves from her book; see Sinha, "Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism."

<sup>105</sup>See letters from Sorabji to Lady Richmond, 12 Apr. 1928; 18 Apr. 1928; 26 Apr. 1928; 19 July 1928, in Folder no. 43, *Cornelia Sorabji Papers*. Also Letter from Sorabji to Mayo, dated 21 Nov. 1928, in Folder no. 50, Ser. 1, Box 7, K.M. Papers.

<sup>106</sup>World Citizen (S.G. Warty), *Sister India: A Critical Examination of and a Reasoned Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo's Mother India* (Bombay: Sister India Office, 1928) p. 143.





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Sarda, the architect of the act, had the following to say of Mayo's connection to his measure:

A few there are, however, who do not belong to India, and who are unhappy over the abolition of child marriage. Their chief representative is Miss Mayo and they fear that when child marriage disappears their profession of ruling the country on which they flourish shall have gone. By belittling the enormous importance of the new law, they betray their hostility to the advancement of the country.<sup>116</sup>

If anything, then, Mayo was seen by the main actors in the campaign for the Sarda Bill as an opponent rather than a supporter of the abolition of child marriage from India.

The growing self-assertion of the women's movement in India during the *Mother India* controversy was especially marked in its relation to Western women's organizations. Some Western feminists, especially in Britain, had seized upon Mayo's book as an opportunity to articulate an imperialist-feminist agenda for their own movement. The British women's movement, having recently won the right to vote for women in Britain, felt free to redirect its energies to the "white woman's burden."<sup>117</sup> Eleanor Rathbone, president of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), emerged in the wake of the *Mother India* controversy as the most influential voice in Britain in favor of taking up the imperial responsibility for the women of India.<sup>118</sup>

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New Literature, 1946), p. 5. Also see File nos. 7, 8, 12, *AIWC Files*; and "Social Welfare Measures," File nos. 8, 9, and 10, *Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers*.

<sup>116</sup>Quoted in *Stri Dharma* 13, no. 3 (Jan. 1930): pp. 77–78.

<sup>117</sup>For the history of British feminism's investment in the "upliftment" of Indian women, see Antoinette Burton, "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and 'The Indian Woman,' 1865–1915," in Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, pp. 137–57; and *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>118</sup>For background on Eleanor Rathbone, see Mary D. Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1949); and Susan Pederson "Rathbone and Daughter: Feminism and the Father at the Fin-de-Siècle," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1996): pp. 98–117. For a discussion of Rathbone's relation to Indian women in particular, see





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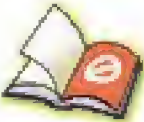


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# Mother India

Katherine Mayo





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## *Introduction*

### THE BUS TO MANDALAY

Calcutta, second largest city in the British Empire, spread along the Ganges called Hooghly, at the top of the Bay of Bengal. Calcutta, big, western, modern, with public buildings, monuments, parks, gardens, hospitals, museums, University, courts of law, hotels, offices, shops, all of which might belong to a prosperous American city; and all backed by an Indian town of temples, mosques, bazaars and intricate courtyards and alleys that has somehow created itself despite the rectangular lines shown on the map. In the courts and alleys and bazaars many little bookstalls, where narrow-chested, near-sighted, anæmic young Bengali students, in native dress, brood over piles of fly-blown Russian pamphlets.

Rich Calcutta, wide-open door to the traffic of the world and India, traffic of bullion, of jute, of cotton—of all that India and the world want out of each other's hands. Decorous, sophisticated Calcutta, where decorous and sophisticated people of all creeds, all colors and all costumes go to Government House Garden Parties, pleasantly to make their bows to Their Excellencies, and pleasantly to talk good English while they take their tea and ices and listen to the regimental band.

You cannot see the street from Government House Gardens, for the walls are high. But if you could, you would see it filled with traffic—motor traffic, mostly—limousines, touring cars, taxis and private machines. And rolling along among them now and again, a sort of Fifth Avenue bus, bearing the big-lettered label, "Kali Ghat."

This bus, if you happen to notice it, proceeds along the parkside past the Empire Theater, the various clubs, St. Paul's Cathedral, past the Bishop's House, the General Hospital, the London Missionary Society's Institution, and presently comes





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"With a good fire everything burns but the navel," explains Mr. Haldar. "That is picked out of the ashes by the temple attendants, and, with a gold coin provided by the dead person's family, is rolled in a ball of clay and flung into the Ganges. We shall now see the Ganges."

Again he conducts us through the crowds to a point below the temple, where runs a muddy brook, shallow and filled with bathers. "This," says Mr. Haldar, "is the most ancient remaining outlet of the Ganges. Therefore its virtues are accounted great. Hundreds of thousands of sick persons come here annually to bathe and be cured of their sickness just as you see those doing now. Also, such as would supplicate the goddess for other reasons bathe here first, to be cleansed of their sins."

As the bathers finished their ablutions, they drank of the water that lapped their knees. Then most of them devoted a few moments to grubbing with their hands in the bottom, bringing up handfuls of mud which they carefully sorted over in their palms. "Those," said Mr. Haldar, "are looking for the gold coins flung in from the burning-ghat. They hope."

Meantime, up and down the embankment, priests came and went, each leading three or four kids, which they washed in the stream among the bathers and then dragged back, screaming and struggling, toward the temple forecourt. And men and women bearing water-jars, descending and ascending, filled their jars in the stream and disappeared by the same path.

"Each kid," continued Mr. Haldar. "must be purified in the holy stream before it is slain. As for the water-carriers, they bring the water as an offering. It is poured over Kali's feet, and over the feet of the priests that stand before her."

As Mr. Haldar took leave of us, just at the rear of the outer temple wall, I noticed a drain-hole about the size of a man's hand, piercing the wall at the level of the ground. By this hole, on a little flat stone, lay a few marigold flowers, a few rose-petals, a few pennies. As I looked, suddenly out of the hole gushed a flow of dirty water, and a woman, rushing up, thrust a cup under it and drank.





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sorts and localities, talked at length with the doctors, and studied conditions and cases. I made long sorties in the open country from the North-West Frontier to Madras, sometimes accompanying a district commissioner on his tours of checkered duty, sometimes "sitting in" at village councils of peasants, or at Indian municipal board meetings, or at court sessions with their luminous parade of life. I went with English nurses into bazaars and courtyards and inner chambers and over city roofs, visiting where need called. I saw, as well, the homes of the rich. I studied the handling of confinements, the care of children and of the sick, the care and protection of food, and the values placed upon cleanliness. I noted that personal habits of various castes and grades, in travel or at home, in daily life. I visited agricultural stations and cattle-farms, and looked into the general management of cattle and crops. I investigated the animal sanctuaries provided by Indian piety. I saw the schools, and discussed with teachers and pupils their aims and experience. The sittings of the various legislatures, all-India and provincial, re-paid attendance by the light they shed upon the mind-quality of the elements represented. I sought and found private opportunity to question eminent Indians—princes, politicians, administrators, religious leaders; and the frankness of their talk, as to the mental and physical status and conditions of the peoples of India, thrown out upon the background of my personal observation, proved an asset of the first value.

And just this excellent Indian frankness finally led me to think that, after all, there are perhaps certain points on which—south, north, east and west—you *can* generalize about India. Still more: that you can generalize about the only matters in which we of the busy West will, to a man, see our own concern.

John Smith of 23 Main Street may care little enough about the ancestry of Peter Jones, and still less about his religion, his philosophy, or his views on art. But if Peter cultivates habits of living and ways of thinking that make him a physical menace not only to himself and his family, but to all the rest of the block, then practical John will want details.





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## Chapter II

### "SLAVE MENTALITY"

"Let us not put off everything until Swaraj<sup>1</sup> is attained and thus put off Swaraj itself," pleads Gandhi. "Swaraj can be had only by brave and clean people."<sup>2</sup>

But, in these days of the former leader's waned influence, it is not for such teachings that he gains ears. From every political platform stream flaming protests of devotion to the death to Mother India; but India's children fit no action to their words. Poor indeed she is, and sick—ignorant and helpless. But, instead of flinging their strength to her rescue, her ablest sons, as they themselves lament, spend their time in quarrels together or else lie idly weeping over their own futility.

Meantime the British Government, in administering the affairs of India, would seem to have reached a set rate of progress, which, if it be not seriously interrupted, might fairly be forecast decade by decade. So many schools constructed, so many hospitals; so many furlongs of highway laid, so many bridges built; so many hundred miles of irrigation canal dug; so many markets made available; so many thousand acres of waste land brought under homestead cultivation; so many wells sunk; so much rice and wheat and millet and cotton added to the country's food and trade resources.

This pace of advance, compared to the huge needs of the country, or compared to like movements in the United States or in Canada, is slow. To hasten it materially, one single element would suffice—the hearty, hard-working and intelligent devotion to the practical job itself, of the educated Indian. Today, however, few signs appear, among Indian public men,

<sup>1</sup>Self-government.

<sup>2</sup>*Young India*, Nov. 19, 1925, p. 399.





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And although it is accepted that the ancient inventors of these and kindred emblems intended them as aids to the climbing of spiritual heights, practice and extremely detailed narratives of the intimacies of the gods, preserved in the hymns of the fireside, give them literal meaning and suggestive power, as well as religious sanction in the common mind.<sup>6</sup>

"Fools," says a modern teacher of the spiritual sense of the phallic cult, "do not understand, and they never will, for they look at it only from the physical side."<sup>7</sup>

But, despite the scorn of the sage, practical observation in India forces one to the conclusion that a religion adapted to the wise alone leaves most of the sheep unshepherded.

And, even though the sex-symbols themselves were not present, there are the sculptures and paintings on temple walls and temple chariots, on palace doors and street-wall frescoes, realistically demonstrating every conceivable aspect and humor of sex contact; there are the eternal songs on the lips of the women of the household; there is, in brief, the occupation and pre-occupation of the whole human world within the child's vision, to predispose thought.

It is true that, to conform to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Circulation of and Traffic in Obscene Publications, signed in Geneva on September 12, 1923, the Indian Legislature duly amended the Indian Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure; and that this amendment duly prescribes set penalties for "whoever sells, lets to

<sup>6</sup>*Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Abbé J.A. Dubois, 1821. Edited and corrected by H.K. Beauchamp. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1924, pp. 111-12, 628-31, etc.

<sup>7</sup>Swami Vivekananda, in *Bhakti Yoga*. For a brief and liberal discussion of the topic see Chapter XIII in *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by the Earl of Ronaldshay, Constable & Co., Ltd., London, 1925.

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*Reddi Papers Speeches and Writings*, Volume II, Part 2 (included in the contemporary responses section at back of this volume). For a discussion of how nationalist responses to *Mother India* were implicated in the alternative construction of a "respectable sexuality" in India, see Mrinalini Sinha, "Nationalism and Respectable Sexuality in India", *Genders* 21 (1995): 30-57.



**Mother India**, a polemical attack against Indian self-rule written by U. S. historian Katherine Mayo, was met with a storm of controversy when it was published in 1927. The controversy it generated still reverberates, and thus is still worth revisiting, some fifty years after Indian independence. In responding to Mayo's argument in *Mother India*, the leaders of the national movement and the independent women's movement in India laid the foundations of an alliance that gave modern Indian nationalism its distinctive character.

Mrinalini Sinha's edition of *Mother India* provides both selections of this controversial book and commentary on the *Mother India* phenomenon. The heated debates *Mother India* incited are examined in the context of U. S. domestic, British imperial, and Indian nationalist politics. Unlike previous editions of *Mother India*, Sinha's examines the history of cultural feminisms and the relations between women's movements in the United States, Britain, and India; the examination of these different movements provides insights into varied reactions to Mayo's book. The edition includes responses to *Mother India* from Mayo's contemporaries, representatives of the women's movement, and of the anti-caste movement in India.

Intended as a tool for students and teachers alike, this book will be an important text in the field of women's studies, cultural studies, political science, history, and religion, among others.

*"An excellent piece of work. It is truly sophisticated, and has the power to change our view of the course of Indian nationalism in late colonial India."*

—GERALDINE FORBES, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT OSWEGO

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A N N A R B O R

The University of  
Michigan Press

ISBN 0-472-06715-X

